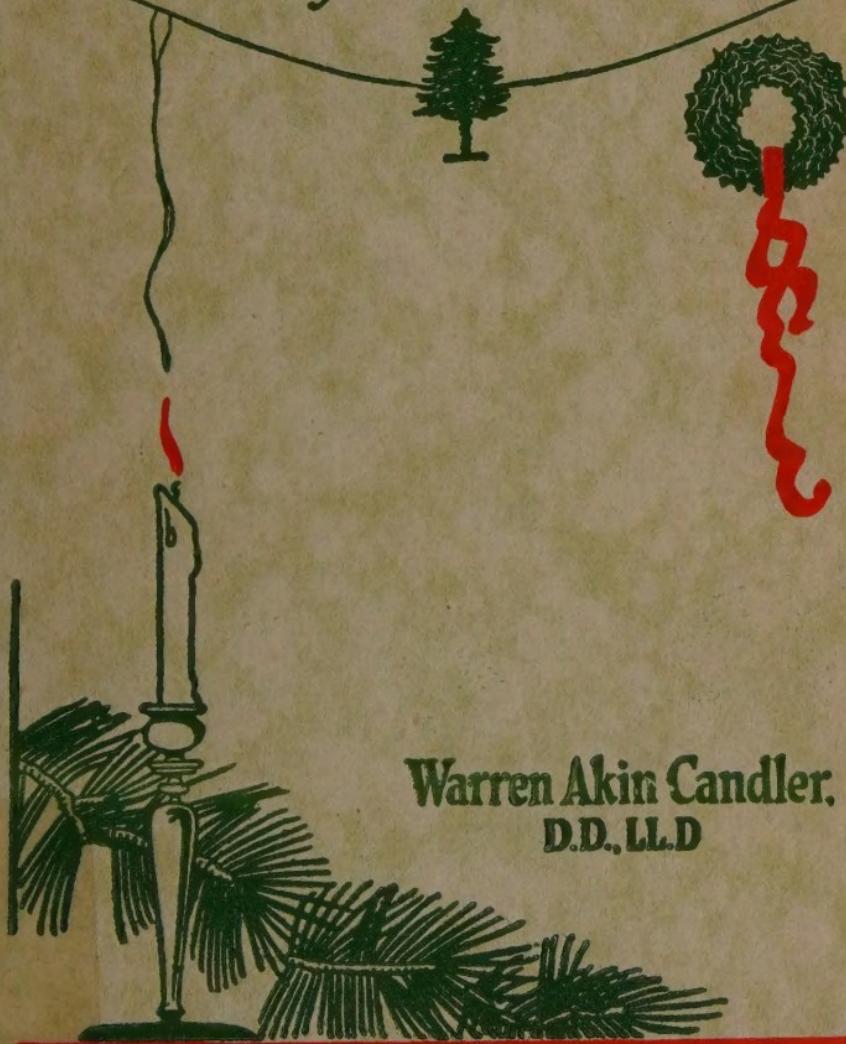


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The Feast of the Family on the Birthday of the King





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The Feast of the Family
on
The Birthday of the King



BROWN'S FAMOUS PICTURES, NO. 711

BOUGUEREAU. 1826-

NATIVITY

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The Feast of the Family on The Birthday of the King

BY

WARREN AKIN CANDLER, D.D., LL.D.

bp.
1857-



NASHVILLE
THE COKESBURY PRESS
1923

Copyright, 1923, by
LAMAR & BARTON

Printed in the United States of America

Nashville, 810 Broadway
Dallas, 13c8 Commerce
Richmond, Fifth and Grace
San Francisco, Pacific Building

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O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

O LITTLE town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee to-night.

For Christ is born of Mary;
And gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth!
And praises sing to God the King,
And peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently,
The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven.

*No ear may hear His coming;
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still,
The dear Christ enters in.*

*O holy Child of Bethlehem!
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in,
Be born in us to-day.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Immanuel!*



BROWN'S FAMOUS PICTURES. NO. 711

NATIVITY

BOUGUEREAU. 1824-

The Most Sublime Event in Human History

IF somewhere upon our planet a meteoric stone, charged with magnetic qualities, should fall, it would attract world-wide attention. If upon it were found impressed evidences that it had been projected from the hands of God upon the earth, and that its touch imparted healing for man's worst woes, how the multitude would flock to see it and touch it!

In the coming of Jesus among men we have an event far more wonderful than all this; for the most conclusive evidences show that He came from God, that He brought healing to the nations, and that He has magnetic qualities which tend to draw all men unto Him.

He comes as no inanimate stone might fall in a strange, mateless mass from some unknown quarter of the universe. He is the Word made flesh, dwelling among men full of grace and truth. "In him is the fullness of the Godhead bodily," as St. Paul teaches; and in Him is the perfection of manhood spiritually. He shows

how deep divine love can stoop to rescue men, and how humanity can rise when touched with His heavenly power.

The incarnation, begun by the birth and eternalized by the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus, is the most sublime and influential fact in the history of our world. It is this fact we celebrate at Christmas.

It is a matter of small moment whether men have or have not fixed upon the correct date for the annual celebration of the birth of our Lord. It remains too clear for doubt that some nineteen hundred years ago an event occurred in Palestine which has been more influential for good among men than all the campaigns of the high captains of the earth and all the efforts of the sages and statesmen of the ages.

A brief life, with a manger cradle at one end and a borrowed tomb at the other, was spent in poverty deeper than that of the birds of the air and the foxes of the forest. And yet from it has sprung all the riches, both material and immaterial, found in what we call Christian civilization. The outcome of that life is the miracle of history.

Men need not perplex themselves about the phenomenon of Bethlehem's star and the wonder

of the singing angels hovering above the amazed shepherds. If He is not very God as well as very man, the lights of civilization, lit by His hand, which burn above our heads every day and every night, are far greater and far more mysterious than the luminary which the entranced Wise Men followed. The music which from the great cathedral to the humble chapel pours itself forth upon the evening air everywhere throughout Christendom is a greater marvel than the angelic strains which fell upon the ears of the enraptured shepherds.

Whence all this brightness in Christian lands, with thick darkness everywhere else in the world? Whence all these Handels and Beethovens and Haydns, and this innumerable company of singers and players on instruments which no man can number, making Christian lands resonant with strains of unearthly gladness, while in the regions beyond these lands humanity sits disconsolate, with harp unstrung, upon the willows which grow by the stream of comfortless earthly grief?

Surely there has broken in upon our world a supernatural life of love which seeks to encompass all mankind in its warm embrace. As one has said, "The world itself is changed, and is no

more the same that it was; it has never been the same since Jesus left it. The air is charged with heavenly odors, and a kind of celestial consciousness, a sense of other worlds, is wafted on us in its breath."

The facts of contemporaneous history show that a superhuman energy, issuing from the man Christ Jesus, is active in the world, working for the amelioration of human ills and the accomplishment of human perfection. No marvel of a bygone age can exceed in magnitude this manifest miracle before our eyes.

Christian history, after every just subtraction is made for all possible hypocrisies, infidelities, and failures, is a result of such stupendous power and worth that nothing but an incarnation of God is adequate cause by which to account for it. Nothing less could have achieved the results recorded in Christian history. Without this divine entrance into human life all the stock of goodness in Christian lands is an inexplicable mystery. In them as nowhere else are seen the visible and blessed effects of a vivid sense of the divine impressed upon manners, literature, laws, social institutions, and national characters. The contrast between Christian and pagan lands with respect to all these high things is as marked as

the difference between the palm groves of the tropics and the dwarfed shrubbery of the frigid zones.

Uninspired human intellects could never have conceived the idea of the incarnation any more than unaided human powers could have executed the plan of salvation, or unassisted human agents could have achieved the results of Christian history. The highest thought of a kindred nature of which ancient or modern paganism has been capable has been a deified man losing his humanity by his apotheosis, or a humanized god appearing as a man, beset with human infirmities and bereft of heavenly character. Its Jupiter misbehaving in the heavens, or its Hercules disappearing in the clouds, is the best god it can manufacture. But in Jesus we have neither a god become a man nor a man become a god, but the God-Man. He is Immanuel—"God with us." He bridges the tremendous chasm between God and man, revealing at once both the immeasurable depths to which divine love can descend and the unearthly heights to which human nature can ascend. It is no wonder that angels saw disclosed at His birth the highest glory of God and the noblest hope of man. Even the inanimate forces of nature themselves might

well have responded to the appearance on earth of Him who in the beginning was God, and was with God, and without whom was not anything made that was made.

Stars might well come bending in obeisant radiance before Him who set them in their places at the first and who laid before them their pathways in the trackless spaces of the firmament. One effulgent wanderer may well have been started from the outset of the morning of creation to meet Him at Bethlehem with transfiguring light to glorify with celestial honors His earthly destitution. Such an arrangement would have involved no excess of homage to the combination of wisdom, love, and power which in Redemption shine.

With no extravagance of irreverent fancy sings the great Milton in his "Hymn on the Nativity":

*"But peaceful was the night
Wherein the Prince of Light
His reign of peace upon the earth began:
The winds with wonder whist
Smoothly the waters kissed,
Whispering new joys to the mild ocean,
Who now hath quite forgot to rave,
While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmed wave."*

*"The stars with deep amaze
Stand fixed in steadfast gaze,
Bending one way their precious influence,
And will not take their flight,
For all the morning light,
Or Lucifer that often warned them thence;
But in their glimmering orbs did glow,
Until their Lord Himself bespake and bade them go."*

The season which recalls the sacred scene of the stall and the manger should wake within us all every worshipful sentiment and benevolent impulse. Heaven and earth call us to give glory to God in the highest and to promote piety and peace among men.

*"Come hither, ye faithful,
Triumphantly sing!
Come, see in the manger
The angels' dread King!
To Bethlehem hasten
With joyful accord!
O come ye, come hither
To worship the Lord!"*

*"To Thee, then, O Jesus,
This day of Thy birth,
Be glory and honor
Through heaven and earth;*

*True Godhead incarnate,
Omnipotent Word!
O come, let us hasten
To worship the Lord."*

As Children Let Us Worship at His Feet

IT is by no means certain that December 25th is the correct date of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Quite probably it is incorrect.

But the date is far less important than the fact which is celebrated upon it. Perhaps it is best that there is uncertainty about the date, lest some form of superstition gather about it.

But we might well celebrate on every day in the year the great fact of the incarnation of the Son of God. Whatever may have been the date of His birth, it remains true that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only-begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth" (John i:14).

The Son of God became the Son of Man that the sons of men might become the sons of God. He came to men that men might come to God. He showed forth the human life of God that human nature might be enabled to partake of the divine nature (1 Peter 1:4).

Hereby he manifested the loftiest sacrificial love, and in His sacrifice rose, in His perfected

humanity, to the highest level of divine glory. "Being in the form of God, he grasped not at equality with God as for a prize: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians ii:6-11).

The first Adam grasped selfishly for equality with God, and in so doing fell below the level of what human nature was designed to be (Genesis ii:5). But the second Adam dared to descend to the lowest depths of earth humiliation and death that He might raise human nature to the highest heights of heavenly glory and life. By the way of self-assertion the former brought sin and death into the world; but by the path of self-sacrifice the latter brought life and immortality to light.

Such being the case, the incarnation is the most

amazing fact in the history of the universe. Rightly understood it is the key which opens the whole meaning of creation and redemption. The cradle of Bethlehem looks to the cross of Calvary, and the cross of Calvary to the resurrection from the grave in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea, and the resurrection to the ascension, and the ascension to the consummation of all things when "He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when he shall have put down all rule and authority and power" (1 Corinthians xv:24).

It is not strange, therefore, that Christendom reckons time from the birth of Jesus. Until the reign of the Emperor Justinian, Christians had reckoned time from the death of our Lord, while the people of the Roman Empire reckoned from the founding of the Imperial City. But the learned and devout Dionysius in the days of Justinian, with a true instinct, began to count days and years from the birth of Jesus. His example was followed by many other saintly souls until at length in the sixth century all Christians set the starting point of modern history at the birth, not at the death, of Christ. And they celebrated the stupendous event with holy joy in keeping with its sacred significance.

Thus began the celebrations which finally brought forth Christmas.

The singing of Christmas Carols and other sacred music in celebration of the Nativity of Christ can be traced as far back as the second century, a large sarcophagus belonging to that period having been discovered on which was sculptured the representation of a Christian family joining in such choral praise to the Babe of Bethlehem.

But that which began in pious devotion soon degenerated into something worse than selfish scenes. The holy celebration was turned into a veritable saturnalia in which the Blessed Child was forgotten; and vice seized the occasion to disport itself in wanton self-indulgence. Such excesses were indulged that the clergy found it necessary to forbid "the Christmas Carols" and discourage the celebration.

What an exhibition of depravity was there when the celebration of the most wonderful exhibition of divine love was turned into the indulgence of the coarsest forms of selfishness!

But we shall do well to remember that our generation also has thus perverted Christmas. Among multitudes it has become utterly Christless. It is spent in unrestrained indulgences, in

gluttony, in rioting, and even in drunkenness. How could the worst and most benighted have ever so completely missed its meaning and misused its purpose?

In the two accounts of the Nativity recorded in the Gospels we see with what worshipful and rapturous joy the birth of Jesus was celebrated by those to whom the fact was first made known.

In the Gospel according to St. Matthew we read of the wise men, who came from afar to find Him: "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshiped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh" (Matthew ii: 10, 11). What royal gifts were these to the King! What adoring love was there! What utter absence of selfish and sinful merriment!

In the Gospel according to St. Luke we note similar devotion on the part of the shepherds to whom singing angels came saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." After going to Bethlehem, whither the angels had directed them, and seeing the babe in the manger, "the shepherds returned,

glorifying God for all the things they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them" (Luke ii: 20). What a contrast does their rapt gladness show in comparison with the bacchanalian paganism of many nowadays who profess and call themselves Christians!

The men of the ancient world seem to have been more serious than many moderns appear. The great issues of life with them were not in things material, but in things spiritual. They struggled with the problems of sin and suffering, and, when One appeared who offered redemption for their souls, they sought Him with the greatest earnestness, and when they found Him they rejoiced with exceeding joy. They were far too thoughtful and worshipful to celebrate the birth of Jesus with vain frivolities and profane dissipations.

The real Christian joy at Christmas is religious joy. It is the jubilation of the soul that a Saviour from sin and death has come. The very atmosphere of the day palpitates with the sense of God's redeeming love. Above pious heads on His natal day the sky seems to bend low, and angelic music falls upon their ears as if the heavenly home and the Father's house were in hearing distance, and scarcely out of sight. Selfishness flees their

hearts while their souls are filled with tender love to little children and gentle ministries to the poor who find no room in the inns and palaces of earth.

Above all others, Christmas is the feast of the children. He who rested His first night on earth in a manger for a cradle has forever sanctified childhood and poverty. Since He came mankind can never look upon them again as it did before. He has breathed on them the fragrance of the heavenly.

Concerning One whose birth has so changed all things here below, rationalism may not, without presumption, speak its poor words of speculation and doubt. It is more out of place at Christmas and Easter than on any other days of the year. Let these sorry skeptics explain to us how these sacred seasons ever came to be observed. How is it that Jesus has made a new date line for all mankind?

Stars and seasons combine to do Him homage, whose infant head once rested on the straw of the manger at Bethlehem. Herein is a miracle more astounding than the star which led the Magi to where He lay and more wonderful than the song which the angels sang to the shepherds.

In the presence of all the facts about us, to say

nothing of the marvelous Christian history which has gone before us, how can any sane and pure mind indulge such profane ribaldry as that of talking about the biological impossibility of the Virgin Birth of our Lord? Is it reasonable to believe that all Christian history has sprung from the life of a bastard, or the falsehood of an impostor? Has the highest type of life sprung from a source so base? Has Christian civilization risen from corruption so deep?

Let our Christmas carols cast out all vile doubts as well as sordid selfishness, while with the little children, in the sweet faith of our childhood, we worship at His feet.

*"All praise to Thee, eternal Lord,
Clothed in the garb of flesh and blood;
Choosing a manger for Thy throne
While worlds on worlds are Thine alone.*

*"A little child Thou art our guest,
That weary ones in Thee may rest;
Forlorn and lonely is Thy birth,
That we may rise to heaven from earth.*

*"Were earth a thousand times so fair,
Beset with gold and jewels rare,
It yet were far too poor to be
A narrow cradle, Lord, for Thee.*



R 226
BROWN'S FAMOUS PICTURES. NO. 485

FROM PAINTING BY RUBENS. 1577-1640
HOLY FAMILY

*"Ah, blessed Jesus, holy Child,
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled,
Within my heart, that it may be
A quiet chamber kept for Thee."*

The Home-Builder of the Ages

JESUS, the Son of Man, during His days in the flesh, was the most homeless of human beings.

At His entrance upon His earthly life, there was no room for Him in the inn even, and His cradle was a manger in the stall of an ox.

At His exit, by way of the cross, He was left alone in His agony in Gethsemane and was buried in a borrowed sepulcher.

All along the way, between the beginning and the ending of the days of His manifestation among men, He was more homeless than the foxes of the forest and the birds of the air.

Very pathetic is a statement about Him which is found in the Fourth Gospel: "Every man went unto his own house. Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives" (John vii:53 and viii:1).

Throughout all the four Gospels runs the same sad strain, which in the Gospel by John sounds forth in these words: "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John i:10, 11).

Although so homeless, the Carpenter of Nazareth has been the greatest home-builder of all the ages. He, above all others, "setteth the solitary in families" (Psalm lxviii:6).

To His immediate followers, in the hour of their deepest desolation, He said: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John xiv:2).

From His cross He spoke words of tenderness, which made a home for His mother and gave a mother to John: "When Jesus, therefore, saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved, standing by, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her into his own home" (John xix:26, 27).

With such a charge in his house, how changed and glorified ever afterwards was the home of the beloved disciple! While in exile on Patmos the vision of his home in Galilee and the Virgin Mother must have filled his sleeping and waking moments, causing him to cry out against the restless waves of the separating sea: "And there shall be no more sea" (Revelation xxi:1).

Throughout the Acts of the Apostles, and the

Pauline Epistles, the record discloses the saving currents of redeeming love flowing around households. Now it is Cornelius, "a devout man and one that feared God with his house" (Acts x:2), and then it is Lydia, "and her household," who are baptized. The "household" of Stephanas (Corinthians i:16), baptized by Paul himself, and the gracious and godly "household of Onesiphorus" (2 Timothy iv:19), are brought in view, and the radiance of purest life in Christian families streams forth from the home circles thus revealed.

The Church itself is set forth as a household of faith. The forces of saving grace draw into "the household of God" the Ephesians, who were aforetime "strangers and foreigners" (Ephesians ii:19), and make them "members of the whole family in heaven and earth" which bears the name of Jesus (Ephesians iii:15).

Since the incarnation of the Son of God yields such blessed fruitage in Christian households, Christmas may well be accounted the Festival of the Family, the Feast of the Home.

How it draws together the scattered members of families who for days, or months, or years have been separated one from another!

From crowded centers of commerce the young and the old, out of shops and counting houses, at Christmas return for a few blessed hours, at least, to the sweet country homes from which they went forth to enter the world of trade. The joyous welcomes that meet them will heal the wounds made upon their hearts by the hard knocks of selfishness which have hit them, and the wearisomeness of toilsome days will be forgotten as they join in the family worship in which holy fathers lead the prayers and saintly mothers join in our songs.

Joyous youths flock home from schools and colleges at the coming of the holidays, and from things of learning turn their minds and hearts to the more heavenly things of love.

And old hearts grow young again as the children come trooping home for Christmas.

Alas! to some homes the children will never come again. Some are in one place and some in another, and some have "reached a fairer country, far away."

Many youthful forms are sleeping on the fields beyond the sea who a few short years ago were filling happy homes with the merry voices of boyhood! How heavy are the shadows that rest on the households from which they went forth to

war. Ah! how many tired hearts sigh at Christmas for vanished hands and the sound of voices hushed in death!

But life is older than death, and shall be still glorious life after death itself has died!

The deathless One offers to the eye of faith visions of heavenly home-comings, more joyous than all the Christmas reunions of earth.

They are gathering homeward from every land one by one, and by and by there will be fulfilled the vision of the lonely seer of Patmos, when from that sad isle, in an unfrequented sea, he saw "the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, and heard a great voice saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation xxi: 1-4).

O for rest there in that glad company when there shall be no more separating seas and heart-breaking sorrows!

*"The land beyond the sea,
O how the lapsing years,
Mid our unsubmissive tears,
Have borne now singly, now in fleets, the biers
Of those we love to Thee,
Calm land beyond the sea."*

*"The land beyond the sea,
How dark our present home!
By the dull beach and sullen foam
How wearily, how drearily we roam,
With arms outstretched to Thee,
Calm land beyond the sea."*

*"The land beyond the sea,
When will our toil be done?
Slow-footed years more swiftly run
Into the gold of that unsetting sun;
Homesick we are for Thee,
Calm land beyond the sea."*

"Blessed are the homesick; for they shall get home."

It will soon be Christmas Day in heaven when all God's widely scattered children will come singing home, and remain forever in our Father's House. Then not from a cross of pain, but from a throne of glory, Jesus will direct the gaze of a

mother to a long-lost son, and say, "Woman, behold thy son!" and to the son who has waited so long for her there, "Son, behold thy mother!" And in their heavenly home they two will abide forever with Him and the whole glad family of God.

"Come, let us join our friends above,
That have obtained the prize;
And on the eagle wings of love
To joys celestial rise:
Let all the saints terrestrial sing
With those to glory gone;
For all the servants of our King
In earth and heaven are one.

"One family we dwell in Him,
One Church above, beneath,
Though now divided by the stream,
The narrow stream of death.
One army of the living God,
To His command we bow,
Part of His host have crossed the flood,
And part are crossing now.

"Our spirits too shall quickly join,
Like theirs with glory crowned,
And shout to see our Captain's sign,
To hear His trumpet sound,

*O that we now might grasp our Guide!
O that the word were given!
Come, Lord of hosts, the waves divide,
And land us all in heaven!"*

Coming Home at Christmas

ALL over our land thousands turn homeward with the coming of Christmas. The Babe of Bethlehem, who was born in a manger and lived a homeless life upon earth, hath set the solitary in families and given us homes. No country has so many homes as ours.

Happy school girls, who have been eagerly counting the days until the holiday recess, go home, carrying many dainty gifts of their deft handiwork to the loved ones there.

Eager boys from college halls go back to the fireside where anxious prayers have risen daily for their welfare since first they went away.

Young men from the marts of commerce and the paths of trade put the city with its manifold temptations and cares behind them, to find rest and strength in the old country home.

Middle-aged men and women return to the homes of their childhood to meet again brothers and sisters in family gatherings, and to cheer once more with their presence the belated pilgrims who still tarry below, divided between the children who have gone before and those who

still meet once a year around the parental hearth-stone.

What blessed joys, what tender memories, what heavenly hopes the Christmas time awakens!

And to some the merry season brings new pangs of sorrow—griefs they never knew before. Since the last Christmas dear old parents have gone home to God, and the children who used to gather about them will never go again to the old homestead, because so much of the home that was there has vanished into heaven. Aged mothers watch for sons who come no more. Bereaved husbands walk alone the rounds of the children's rooms, trying vainly to be both mother and father in preparing the surprises for the little ones on Christmas morning. And stricken wives do their mother's best to keep little ones from feeling too keenly, the first Christmas since the husband died, that "Papa is dead." Thousands of little ones know as they have not known before the losses which the sorrowful year has brought them.

Good men and women will thank God for the earth homes behind them and for the heavenly home before them; and wayfaring outcasts will stop to think of golden days gone by, and to

wonder if somehow they will not one day find a resting place in the home of God above. And so with all classes the season should be one of tenderness and love and thankfulness.

Above all let us be thankful that our country contains so many homes to which our people, both young and old, may go. These are the citadels of national strength.

The Christian home is the sufficient answer to the socialists, and the answer to all the new lights with their wild views of woman, marriage, and motherhood.

Wherever the Christian home has been set aside for fanciful innovations and visionary radicalisms, there society has drifted toward beastliness and disorder. And wherever home-making is easy to a people, and homes are common, we find the social system bringing forth divinest joys and giving birth to noblest men and women.

Let us be thankful for the homes that are, and also for the homes that have been; for there are fallen homes which still bring nourishment to children's children. How many such can be recalled as we read these beautiful words of the lamented J. G. Holland: "I recall a home like this, long since left behind in the journey of life; and its memory floats back over me with a

shower of emotions and thoughts toward whose precious fall my heart opens itself greedily like a thirsty flower. . . . The hour of evening has come, the lamps are lighted, and a good man in middle life—though very old he seems to me—takes down the well-worn Bible and reads a chapter from its hallowed pages. A sweet woman sits at his side, with my sleepy head upon her knee, and brothers and sisters are grouped reverently around. I do not understand the words, but I have been told they are the words of God, and I believe. The long chapter ends, and then we all kneel down and the good man prays. I fall asleep with my head in the chair, and the next morning remember nothing of the way in which I went to bed. After breakfast the Bible is taken down and the good man prays again; and again is the worship repeated through all the days of many golden years. The pleasant converse of the fireside, the simple songs of home, the words of encouragement as I bend over my school tasks, the kiss as I lie down to rest, the patient bearing with the freaks of my restless nature, the gentle counsels mingled with reproofs and approvals, the sympathy that meets and assuages every sorrow and sweetens every success—all these return to me now, and I feel as if

I had once lived in heaven, and, straying, had lost my way."

Some have lost so much in the homes which are gone that this world holds nothing good enough to give them compensation for their loss. They will have to go to the home in heaven to recover their treasure.

Well, we all shall go by and by. God wants His children at home. No doting mother will welcome more gladly her absent children home this Christmas season than our Father has welcomed some of His children home this year. He let them stay with us until He could not spare them longer. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints"—precious as the homecoming of our children. Where He is, there He wants His children also.

Blessed Lord, Thou art welcome to them, though "we long to have back what we would not retake." Keep them and us against all ill, and let us come home as soon as is best. Our company is gone before, and we are left alone with Thee.

*"Away with our sorrow and fear!
We soon shall recover our home;
The City of saints shall appear;
The day of eternity come.*



BROWN'S FAMOUS PICTURES. NO. 1535

ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS

VELASQUEZ. 1599-1660

*From earth we shall quickly remove,
And mount to our native abode;
The house of our Father above,
The palace of angels and God.*

*"Our mourning is all at an end,
When raised by the life-giving word,
We see the new city descend,
Adorned as a bride for her Lord;
The city so holy and clean,
No sorrow can breathe in the air:
No gloom of affliction or sin,
No shadow of evil is there."*

The Feast of the Family

CHRISTMAS is pre-eminently the feast of the family. In it we celebrate the birth of Him in whom all the families of the earth are blessed.

The star of Bethlehem shone above holy motherhood and a divine child, and the angels of the advent sang "Glory to God in the highest" when the Eternal Son of the Father became by a human birth the Son of Man.

At this sacred season the hearts of parents turn to their children and the hearts of children turn to their parents. Innocent mirth fills our homes and carries even the aged back to the blessed days of their childhood. All souls, not lost utterly to human tenderness, become young again in the gladness of these festal hours.

The members of households, who have been separated for many days and months, come together again around the family fireside. Memories of the past and hopes of the future fill their souls as they meet one another there. They bring gifts in their hands to express the affection of their hearts.

Such a season is well suited for considering the inestimable value of the family. The best Christmas gift which could come to our nation would be the restoration to the national consciousness of the sanctity of the home.

In the organization of human society three governments have been instituted by divine authority—the Family, the Church, and the State. In point of time the Family preceded both the Church and the State, or rather it combined in itself at first both Church and State.

The Family was God's first Church, and it was the earliest form of civil government. Its sovereign was the father, and His subjects were His children. Truly He ruled by divine right—the divine right of fatherhood. And He was the high priest of His household, serving at the altar of the Church in the home, and establishing the State on religious foundations, which are the only sure bases for government in any form. From such beginnings all civilization which is worthy of the name sprang originally.

The home, therefore, is the unit of civilization. When it is impaired, both the Church and the State share its decay.

When Jehovah would bring forth a commonwealth, composed of a peculiar people appointed

to a peculiar mission, He chose for its founder Abraham, a man of whom He said, "I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment" (Genesis xviii: 19).

After the same manner the ordained rulers of the household of faith are required to evince fitness for public office by fidelity as priests of the home. "Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, *ruling their children and their own houses well* (1 Timothy iii: 12).

According to the Holy Scriptures the first place in any plan for the nurture and education of children is reserved to the home. Its primacy cannot be renounced by the indifference or unfaithfulness of parents, nor usurped by Church or State, without evil consequences following from its subversion.

The love of parents, even vicious parents, for their offspring supplies a higher and more unselfish motive for the right education of children than any other teacher by any possibility can possess. Even dissipated fathers and degraded mothers, with rare exceptions, wish their children to eschew vice and practice virtue.

In turn the natural affection of children for

their parents furnishes a state of mind most favorable for parental instruction. To such education their hearts incline to open as flowers respond to the light of the sun and the dew of the morning.

Who, then, can take the place of such teachers as faithful fathers and loving mothers? What institution of Church or State can do for a child that which the school in the home may do?

If for any cause the educational work of the home is not done, or if it be displaced by any other agency whatsoever, harm accrues to the Family, the Church, and the State.

Neither the day school nor the Sunday school can take the place of the home in the education of a child. Nevertheless, there are parents, not a few, who have abdicated their high office of parenthood and transferred to salaried instructors in the week and Sunday-school teachers on Sunday their solemn responsibility for the education of the children for whose welfare God has laid upon them a sacred obligation which may not be shifted to the shoulders of any other person or power whatsoever without mortal sin. Such indolent or indifferent parents are fond of calling the Church "a nursing mother," and most assuredly they seek to use the Church

as a nurse in order to escape the duties of their own nursery at home. Also they dearly love the paternalism of the State because it seems to relieve them of their parental responsibilities.

For this cause paternalism on the part of the State is growing in America in exact proportion to the decay of home life among the people. At the birth of a child, many parents, to their own discredit and the damage of the State, virtually say to the civil government, "Take this child and nurse it for me." That process culminates in the ownership of the child by the State. Such was the outcome in ancient Sparta, where every youth was fashioned for a soldier to serve his country in a militaristic age in which muscle outranked mind. When this paternalism suffocated the parenthood of Sparta, the commonwealth perished with the passing of the Family.

At best the State in its paternalistic system of education aims at nothing more than making enlightened citizens. Its efforts, even when most successful, culminate in citizenry, and proceed on the false assumption that ignorance is the source of crime and knowledge is its prevention. Such education can not safeguard society on the earth, much less prepare human beings for be-

coming citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Knowledge is power, but it is not purity; and intellectual culture apart from the culture of conscience by religion is a perilous possession.

The world of to-day is developing more power by secular education than it has capacity for directing its power to worthy purposes and safe ends. It is a high-powered world, in danger of running to destruction because its increase in intelligence has outgrown its growth in godliness. It knows too much unless it had more piety. Its supreme need is a world-wide revival of religion.

A widespread revival of religion in the home, strengthening domestic ties by purifying hearts and intensifying affection, is required speedily, lest God "come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal. iv:6).

The home is the hope of the Church and the safeguard of the State. And the heart of the home is its religion.

Family altars are the bulwarks of society. The holy flames which burn there kindle the fires of pious patriotism and encircle society with a glowing defense of devotion. When they cease to burn brightly, chill and darkness fall upon the land. The inspiration of family

prayers sanctifies the household, and the memory of such worship blesses and comforts all its members throughout their lives. A home wherein such supplications rise daily to heaven supplies the purest mental and moral nourishment to children and children's children while it continues to exist, and invigorates their spiritual life after it has passed away.

Blessed is the man who has such a home in memory! More blessed is he who has it in fact! Thrice blessed the children who grow up under its holy nurture and helpful education!

"Home in one form and another is the great object of life. It stands at the end of every day's labor and beckons us to its bosom, and life would be cheerless and meaningless, if we did not discern across the river that divides from the life beyond glimpses of the pleasant mansions prepared for us."

*"Hark, hark, my soul! angelic songs are swelling
O'er earth's green fields and ocean's wave-beat shore;
How sweet the truth those blessed strains are telling
Of that new life when sin shall be no more.*

*"Onward we go, for still we hear them singing,
'Come, weary souls, for Jesus bids you come,'
And through the dark, its echoes sweetly ringing,
The music of the gospel leads us home.*

*“Far, far away, like bells at evening pealing,
The voice of Jesus sounds o'er land and sea;
And laden souls by thousands, meekly stealing,
Kind Shepherd, turn their weary steps to Thee.*

*“Angels, sing on! your faithful watches keeping;
Sing us sweet fragments of the songs above;
Till morning's joy shall end the night of weeping,
And life's long shadows break in cloudless love.”*

The Incarnate Christ Calling Wanderers Home

OF all born of woman, Jesus was the only man who ever chose to be born. His birth was a voluntary coming into our world, and in the celebration of Christmas we rejoice in the fact of that coming.

But if our rejoicing at this blessed season is to be consonant with the event which we celebrate, we must recall the purpose of His coming and sympathize with the heavenly motive which impelled Him to become the Incarnate One. Fortunately He has spoken most clearly and tenderly concerning the object of His assumption of human nature. He said, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke xix:10). This He said to justify Himself against the censure of some who looked with evil eyes upon His compassionate treatment of an ostracized publican. In like manner He uttered the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Prodigal Son to vindicate Himself against the murmurings of Pharisees and scribes who said of Him, "This man re-

ceiveth sinners and eateth with them" (Luke xv: 1-32).

Those beautiful and touching parables are the exposition of the divine and tender aim of the incarnation. They show us that God has joy in the salvation of the lost. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" is the sweet refrain which runs through all of them.

The coming and teachings of Jesus show us that the great God is interested in the welfare of mankind, and that His supreme interest is in the moral fortunes of our lost race.

The only event on earth which the Scriptures assure us stirs joy in heaven is the penitence of a sinner. Great battles may move heaven's grief, and the blaring of trumpets of victors on bloody fields may send their piercing voices skyward to meet descending lamentations of angels over a scene so hard and hateful; but certainly such conflicts arouse no joy on high. The political triumphs of men are small events in heaven's esteem when compared with the return of one penitent child of God from his waywardness. The great commercial movements of the earth do not move to gladness the heart of God, but the turning to Him of one forlorn sinner

fills Him with divine joy, no matter how obscure and degraded such a one may be.

Nothing in our world has such significance to God as a man, and no event in a man's life is by our heavenly Father accounted so important as his regeneration. In nothing is God so interested as in human redemption, and this fact is asserted and demonstrated by the incarnation in the most marvelous manner. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." On nothing else has heaven bestowed so priceless a gift as upon the rescuing of the perishing children of men.

These things being true, the Christmas season is a time for us to readjust our false appraisement of men as compared with mere things. The coming of Christ declares the supreme value of man as man. At this point Christianity comes into the sharpest conflict with the mercantile spirit and the materialistic tendencies of our age, all of which are disposed to treat man as of small account.

Men absorbed in getting money care little for the higher interests of their fellowmen; and there are found not a few who are willing to enrich

themselves by capitalizing the moral weakness of human beings and reaping revenue from the dissipation of drunkards, the debaucheries of opium-eaters, and the earnings of harlots. How cheap is human life to one who is concerned for money-making only!

Our materialistic science likewise cheapens man, declaring that he finds his ancestry and image in the ape and his extinction in the grave. In opposition to a sordid commerce and a senseless science Jesus Christ asserts the supreme importance of a man, declaring that he is but a little lower than the angels and of more value than all the treasures of the world beside. In spite of the blinding greed of commerce and the degrading theories of science it is of vital interest to society to maintain Christ's way of thinking about the value of human nature. Let the Christmas season, therefore, call us back from the delusions of both the academy and the market-place to the acceptance of the Christian appraisement of ourselves and our fellow-men.

And let us be sure that we fix our estimate upon the true element of value in man, upon the element of his spiritual life. Man is great not because he can fight battles, erect governments,

conduct commercial enterprises, write books, frame laws, compose literatures, and fashion arts; but because, being made in the image of God, he can love his heavenly Father and be in turn the object of divine affection.

The highest thing in human nature is its spiritual good. There in the altitudes of being we meet God in prayer and praise and adoration. Our greatest blessing is found in thus meeting with our heavenly Father, and our greatest calamity is our alienation from Him.

At the season which marks the anniversary of the entrance into our humanity of Him who came to seek and to save that which was lost, our supreme joy should be found in the spiritual purpose of Jesus and the triumphs of the gospel of His salvation.

Have any of us known the blessedness of sins forgiven? Do we know Him as our personal Saviour? Then we may well rejoice with angels and archangels as they sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men." In such a case we know the transcendent experience for which the psalmist prayed when he cried, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." With Christ in us the hope of glory we may join in the Magnificat: "My soul doth

magnify the Lord and my Spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour" (Luke i:46, 47).

But if we would enter most deeply into the joy of Christ at this happy season we must know the supreme gladness which comes from seeking and saving the lost. This joy can never be known by men and women who vainly imagine that human nature is not lost at all and needs not to be saved by Christ, or who have done nothing to bring the lost to the Saviour.

The most joyous soul in the world to-day is that man or woman who has done most to bring sinners to repentance.

Such a person shares the very joy of Christ Himself, "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." The purest and highest fountain of joy in the universe is hard by that exalted throne where he sits rejoicing over the repentance and redemption of sinners, and that man, and that man only, may drink of its waters who has contributed to its flow.

The self-satisfied and the self-sufficient, who feel for themselves no need of salvation through Christ, and who are indifferent to the salvation of others or outright opposed to it, are the

farthest removed from the true joy which most befits the Christmas season. These are the Pharisees and the Scribes who stigmatize Jesus for seeking to save publicans and sinners. They are of the same type with the elder brother of the parable, who had no heart to sympathize with the gladness of his father when he rejoiced over the returning prodigal as one who was lost and was found, dead and alive again. Such an insensible wretch could not rejoice at the mouth of a grave out of which the dead had been raised if such a resurrection interfered with his obtaining a bequest.

Selfishness is not capable of the noblest joy. An unspiritual mind knows no more of the joy of heaven than the dull and stupid swine knew of the sweetness of the angelic strains which poured forth upon the vibrant air of Bethlehem's plains at the Nativity. Slops, not songs, interest hogs; and to the coarse and vulgar multitude, who know nothing and care nothing for the spiritual purpose of Christ in coming into our smitten world to seek and to save the lost, the sacred season of Christmas will bring no higher enjoyment than the sensual satisfactions of eating and drinking. Over such Jesus grieves. They are a disappointment to divine grace.

But there are others who may give joy to God at this season. These are the penitent sinners who hear in the holy season their Father calling them with the tender tones of the long ago as the soft notes of distinct music melt the heart by wakening blessed memories.

O hardened man, so far from home, listen to the Christmas bells calling you! The fond mother, who carefully provided for the Christmas joys of your childhood, sleeps under the sod, the snow of winter covering her resting place. If she could only get up for one day, she would go out and seek her wayward son; but she cannot follow you in your wanderings. Her Saviour and yours does go forth, however, to seek and to save you. Hear Him calling you to-day! He gives you the Christmas gift of His redeeming love. Do thou make Him glad with the Christmas gift of thy penitent heart! This is the Christmas gift Christ wants from thee.

In Bethlehem the wise men from the East gave Him gold and frankincense and myrrh as they bent in adoration before Him. He prizes more the gift of a human heart. Hear Him calling, "My son, give me thy heart!"

*"Though Christ a thousand times
In Bethlehem be born,
If He's not born in Thee,
Thy soul is still forlorn.*

*"O, would thy heart but be
A manger for His birth,
God would once more become
A child upon the earth."*



BROWN'S FAMOUS PICTURES. NO. 1024

STAR OF BETHLEHEM

PIGHLIM

Worshipful Wise Men

"NOW when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

The dispersion of the Jews had already begun when Jesus came, and their expectation of a Messiah was as widespread as was their dispersion. Suetonius, in his "Life of Vespasian," says: "Throughout the whole East an ancient uninterrupted opinion had become prevalent that it was fated that at this time some person coming from Judea should gain supreme power." To the same prevalent opinion both Josephus and Tacitus bear witness.

Into the knowledge of this Messianic expectation these "Wise men from the East"—probably Persian Magi—had come, but from what source they had obtained such knowledge cannot be said. It may be that they knew of Balaam's words, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel"

(Numbers xxiv:17); or that among them they had prophets as truly inspired as was Balaam; or that in the days of Esther they had obtained this light from the exiled Hebrews. But let the source of their information be what it may, it is certain that they lived in expectation of the coming Messiah, and that in this hope they put such confidence as moved them when they saw His star in the East to set out quickly on a long and perilous and wearisome journey to find Him and worship Him. Truly they were most serious "seekers after God," who abandoned not their search until they found Him "of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write," and whom Haggai called "The Desire of all Nations!"

As the star which led them appeared in the sky, so they appear in history for a brief season and then vanish out of sight, leaving a trail of glory behind, following which we too may find the way to where the Saviour waits to receive our adoration and offerings. In them was fulfilled the Master's words spoken afterwards, "Seek, and ye shall find." Their earnest search was rewarded with glorious success, which may encourage and instruct us in this far-off time as we too endeavor to find Him.

These men had rich treasures of gold and frank-

incense and myrrh and yet richer treasures of wisdom and knowledge; but without Him their souls were filled with conscious and great want. It is not in wealth or wisdom to satisfy the longing of the human heart for God. Truly cried St. Augustine, "O God, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and inquiet are our souls without Thee!"

These wise men studied the heavens. Fore-runners of our modern astronomers, they kept their nightly vigils watching the firmament which showeth His handiwork. But they did not worship the luminaries that shone in their Eastern skies; they adored that Uncreated Orb whose beams light every man that cometh into the world. And the God of life and light came to them along the paths of their life-work. He met them in the heavens whither their reverent gaze was already directed. He adapted His light to their eyes. He could not fail to give more light to men who followed so earnestly the best light which they had: for they were no listless and indolent seekers after the truth.

What must it have cost them to undertake such a journey as that upon which they went so eagerly! How may not their families and friends have derided them for going on such a "fool's errand"! Over what weary miles must they have

passed, daring all dangers by the way! Yet none of these things moved them, so that they might know Christ. Not more heroically and promptly did Abraham at God's bidding go out from his kindred and his country and his father's house to the land which Jehovah showed him.

And great was their reward. Such seekers are bound to find God. Not more surely does the eye, to which the light is sweet, pledge nature for the dawning of the morning than does the hunger of the honest heart constrain the coming of the revelation of God. Helpless hands can never lift themselves up to heaven in earnest pleading for help without unseen hands reaching down to meet them with aid from above. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they *shall be filled*" (Matt. v:6).

The wise men were not content that their lives should culminate in their becoming astronomers only. They could not be satisfied with anything less than finding and worshiping the true God. They sought knowledge that it might end in adoration. Theirs was no loveless and selfish quest for truth. They did not pursue knowledge for its own sake, as the manner of some proud

and foolish ones is; but they followed truth that it might lead them to God.

And behold in them what a union of wisdom and faith! What a harmony of science and religion is there! Of the triumph of their faith Canon Ryle says: "They saw no miracles to convince them. They heard no teaching to persuade them. They beheld no signs of divinity and greatness to overawe them. They saw nothing but a newborn infant, helpless and weak and needing a mother's care like one of ourselves. And yet when they saw that infant they believed that they saw the divine Saviour of the world. 'They fell down and worshiped him.' We read of no greater faith than this in the whole Bible. It is a faith which deserves to be put side by side with that of the penitent thief. The thief saw one dying the death of a malefactor, and yet prayed to Him and called Him 'Lord.' The wise men saw a newborn babe on the lap of a poor woman, and yet worshiped him and confessed that he was Christ. Blessed indeed are they that can believe in this fashion."

Herod and the chief priests and scribes knew the Old Testament prophecies far better than did those noble strangers; but they did not come to the same conclusion of adoring love, although

Herod falsely professed a desire to "come and worship Him also." Herod and the priests had selfish interests and their party power to preserve. Their eyes were not single, therefore, and the light that was in them became darkness.

There are to-day men who reject the Scriptural accounts of the Virgin Birth for much the same reason; they have their little theological party to support and their pride of opinion to assert. But down the ages "wise men" by the thousands and tens of thousands, with far more learning and infinitely more faith, have poured out their treasures at the feet of the infant Saviour in the Virgin Mother's arms.

These are the men possessed with that deep, wide, and true culture which one has contrasted with selfish culture thus: "Culture thoroughly Christian, culture pursued for ends of benevolence, strengthens faith; but culture that ends in itself and its possessor is infidel in its every tendency. The culture which is pursued for its own sake makes a god of self, and so turns away the soul from all its relations—earthly and heavenly—and self becomes the one great fact of the universe. A culture which does not serve God by direct purpose, and with loving and reverent devotion, is the purest type of practical

infidelity; and there are notable instances, even in so young a civilization as ours, in which constantly ripening culture has been a constantly descending path into paganism.

The wise men had that faith-strengthening culture which leads a pagan to become a Christian; Herod and the priests had that self-centered culture which leads a Christian back to paganism. The Jewish hierarchy turned away from the Babe of Bethlehem, although they were quite accurate in their knowledge of the prophetic literature. What is called "modern scholarship," uttering infidelity from the chair of a theological seminary or from the pulpit of a professedly Christian Church, cannot now excel them either in exegesis or doubt—and both the ancient priests and the modern scribes miss the Saviour in all their tedious and profitless erudition. We do better to go with the "wise men."

The royal gifts of the "wise men," poured out at the feet of the Holy Child, doubtless did much to support Mary and Jesus and Joseph during their exile in Egypt, although the gifts were made without a thought of their ultimate use. The Magi meant worship only, but they did also serve high ends. Worship is never utilitarian in its spirit, but it is always useful in its outcome.

The worship of the God of heaven blessed His children in the earth. Humane progress in modern times is the result of the adoration of Jesus. The alabaster box broken by the nameless "woman of the city" in Simon's house has fed more people than all the carefully conceived plans of all the Judases who have lived from then until now.

Because men love Jesus the Babe of Bethlehem, there has come to us that festal season which we celebrate at Christmas, and in some sense the millions of little children made glad on this Christmas Day by gifts of love owe all the joys of the happy morning to Him to whom the "wise men" gave gifts at Bethlehem.

The Russian peasantry have a legend that an old woman, the Baboushka, was at work when the "wise men from the East," following the star, passed by on their way to Jerusalem. "Come with us," they said, "we have seen His star in the East and go to worship Him." But she replied, "I will come, but not now. When I have set my house in order I will follow you and find Him." Alas! when her work was done the wise men were gone and the star shone no more in the heavens. They say she never found the Christ-child, but that she still lives and

searches for Him, and that, to make sure of finding Him, she visits on Christmas-eve all homes and leaves gifts for the children. The legend is a parable: "When we minister to little children, we minister unto Him." Matthew, who alone of all the four evangelists tells us of the visit and the gifts of the "wise men," tells us also that Jesus said, "Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me" (Matthew xviii: 5).

Let us celebrate this blessed Christmas season as "wise men," reverently studying the things that lead us to Jesus, worshiping with adoring love at His feet, and blessing the little children with the gifts of tender piety. It is not a season for bacchanalian revelry, but for devout meditation, joyous adoration, and abounding benevolence.

*"Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,
Dawn on our darkness and lend us thine aid;
Star of the East, the horizon adorning,
Guide where our Infant Redeemer is laid.*

*"Cold on His cradle the dewdrops are shining;
Low lies His head with the beasts of the stall;
Angels adore Him in slumber reclining,
Maker, and Monarch, and Saviour of all.*

*"Say, shall we yield Him, in costly devotion,
Odors of Edom and offerings divine?
Gems of the mountain, and pearls of the ocean,
Myrrh from the forest, and gold from the mine?"*

*"Vainly we offer each ample oblation,
Vainly with gifts would His favor secure;
Richer by far is the heart's adoration,
Dearer to God are the prayers of the poor."*





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family on the birth-
day of the king.

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